

**fiaf**

**preservation  
of  
film posters**

A method of preserving and storing of film posters

recommended by the Nederlands Filmmuseum

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**introduction**

The motion picture, that attracts millions of people every year and swallows millions in money every year as well, is being studied with increasing attention and, given the important place which the motion picture has in our society, this is a heartening sign.

If one, either as a serious student or merely for his own pleasure, wishes to observe and to study this broad medium in its many facets, it is necessary to do more than just look at films; one must analyse them, collect reviews, consult the literature and study their history. One aspect of that history which has heretofore received too little attention is that of the film poster, one of the most important means of motion picture advertisement. By means of posters it is possible to obtain a picture of the evolution which the film has undergone, and in particular the development of motion picture advertising. One can see, for example, what artistic or perhaps merely commercial purpose a particular film and/or the poster for that film served.

Collecting film posters, then, is an important part of the task of a filmmuseum, and it also offers the opportunity for exciting exhibitions. But such a collection brings many problems with it, particularly for the curator of the "documents illustrative of a near and distant past" who must preserve them for the future as well as for the present. It is remarkable, then, that hardly any thought has been given to the preservation of these posters on an international scale and, further, that there is no standard work on the subject.

However, the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam (Museum of Modern Art), in whose building the Nederlands Filmmuseum is housed, began to collect, store and preserve posters immediately after World War II. For this purpose a special section was set up, and after consultation with museums throughout the world, a staff of specialists finally agreed upon a method for poster preservation which is unique in the museum field. By means of broad contacts, with paper manufacturers to name one example, an efficient system for the collecting, preserving and exhibiting of film posters has been found.

This first Report on the Preservation of Film Posters is based upon results as well as the advice of those experts.

Jan de Vaal  
Nederlands Filmmuseum,  
april 1967

**the treatment of posters which have not yet deteriorated**

For posters in this state it is sufficient just to reinforce the edges, that is, to cover the edges of the reverse side of the poster with self-adhering masking tape, using pressure if necessary. Folds may also be covered to avoid breaks or to stop small ones which have already begun. Small breaks may be covered with thin paper, i.e. strong tissue paper. It is advisable to tear rather than to cut the tissue paper, for a torn edge offers a stronger bond than a cut one.

In all circumstances it is best to back the poster with cheese cloth, but this is costly both in time and in money (See the section dealing with "Restoring posters.")

**storage of posters: by hanging**

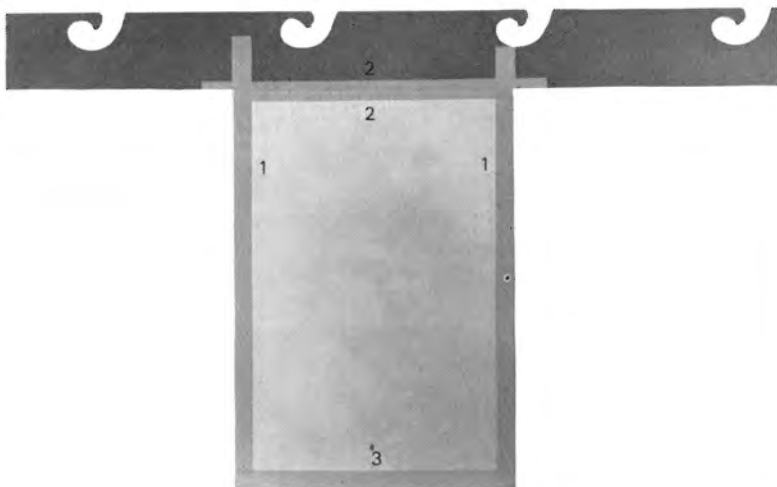
In practice the hanging method appears to be the most efficient.

First, strips of self-adhering masking tape are affixed to the long sides of the poster at the edges. These strips extend several centimetres beyond the top of the poster so that they may be affixed to a cardboard strip, or hanger, that has hooks cut in it in such a way that it may be hung from storage racks. Then another strip of tape is placed along the top of the poster, half on the poster itself and half on the hanger, extending 3 centimetres beyond the poster on either side.

The tape is then cut at the poster sides, and the overlapping piece is bent around and stuck to the other side of the hanger. It is important to affix the tape to the sides first, and then across the top and the bottom, for this will reduce the chances of stretching and distorting the poster. The tape should be pressed on with a wooden spatula. The poster is now ready to be hung. *See photo a.*

Racks capable of storing about 2000 posters demand a space of 2.10 metres high by 1.25 metres wide by 4 metres long. These measurements do not include the aisles.

This system of storage by hanging has the great advantage that one may employ any filing system one wishes. The above mentioned measurements are based upon the so-called Welt-format, or World-format, 155 cm. by 115 cm. In the collection of a filmmuseum, however, there are a great many posters measuring 180 cm. by 120 cm. or even larger. There are also the very large posters consisting of numbered sections, and these should of course, be filed together.

**a****b**



c

If one requires racks for the larger sizes, they should measure 220 cm. high by 130 cm. wide. By a rough estimate, a collection of 6000 posters could be housed in a ground space of 5 m. by 7 m. and 2,5 m. high. See photos b and c

### flat storage

Another storage method employs drawers or sliding shelves to hold the posters, but this system has several disadvantages. First of all, it requires much more space, and secondly, it is impossible to see the collection at a glance. But the greatest drawback is the fact that the posters must be stored one over another, thus exposing them to the possibility of damage.

Furthermore, only a limited number of posters may be placed on top of one another, and they must be of the same size lest they sag or are otherwise harmed. Aside from the fact specially constructed cases or racks must be built to house a collection in this way, it creates a chaotic situation.

An old but ineffective way of storage is the use of big folders, in which 75–100 posters are kept. The drawback is evident. Big posters have to be folded and the folders have to be stored (horizontally) in racks.

### **temperature**

To preserve the paper of a poster and prevent it from drying out, it is necessary to maintain a temperature of 20°C. with a relative humidity of 60%. A proper balance is difficult to obtain. The temperature of 20°C. is based upon experiments and results with regard to the conditions of humidity in Europe.

In storage the paper must be kept dry, in a well-aired space, and the relative humidity of 60% should be maintained, as damp paper fibers are excellent food for mildew and mold. In former years Paradichlorobenzene Crystals were used – sprinkled in storage containers – to prevent the growth of mold.

If one has access to a cool dry place, then one need only place a bucket of unslaked lime in the room to obtain the proper humidity by natural means.

One may also – and this is more efficient, but more expensive – make use of a special humidifier to obtain the proper moisture content in the air such as one finds in film storage rooms.

### **restoring posters**

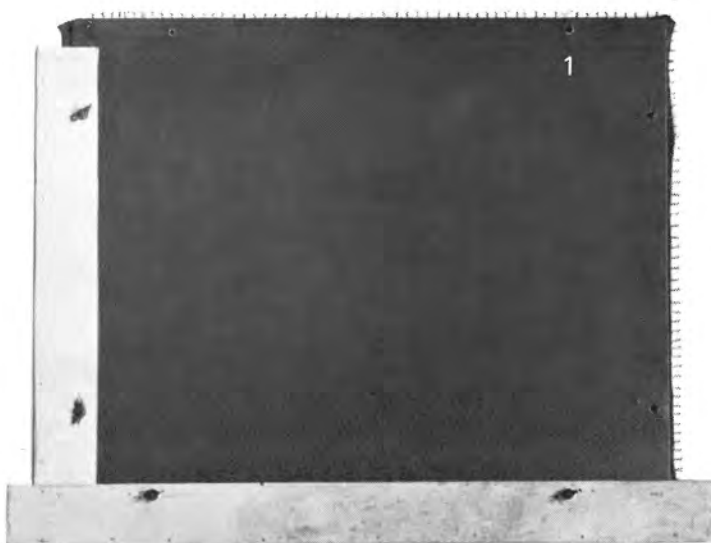
Posters in a state of deterioration should be placed upon a dressed cheese cloth backing in the following way:

On a large stretching table, that is, a table with a hard plastic surface, edged with a wooden frame in which nails have been placed parallel about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cm. apart and protruding about 1 cm. and also protected by a "covering frame", washed cheese cloth is stretched so tautly that it cannot be picked up with the fingers. This surface is then smeared with cellulose glue until it is completely saturated. For this one uses a smearing brush similar to those used by paper hangers. The glue is then rolled in with a wide rubber roller in order to distribute it as regularly as possible over the surface, so that irregular pulling may be avoided.

Upon this layer of cheese cloth and glue a sheet of paper is now affixed, a paper of about the same quality as the poster in question so that distortion after the process may be avoided. It is best to mark the proper position of the paper upon the cheese cloth beforehand. The sheet of



d

**Necessary equipment:**

1 Stretching table

Washed cheese cloth

Paper for intermediate layer

Pure cellulose glue

2 Smearing brush

3 Another brush

4 Matting brush

5 Rubber roller

Selfadhering masking tape

Sandpaper

6 Wooden spatula

7 Small trowel



2



3



4



5



6



7

paper is then rolled up tightly and applied slowly to the cheese cloth in half meter sections, being brushed on the cloth from the centre to either side. During this procedure the rest of the paper is protected by a sheet of plastic which is pulled up  $1/2$  metre each time, thus permitting one to affix the whole sheet of paper without it getting too soft. The paper usually used is old Finnish newsprint, because its composition most closely matches the paper upon which the majority of the posters between 1890 and 1935 were printed. It remains necessary, however, to compare the materials to be combined, the intermediate layer and the poster, for quality, moisture absorption, elasticity and so on.

Around 1900 the poorest quality paper was used for printing posters, since they were only intended for temporary use.

Obviously, these posters are now the most difficult to restore.

Once the paper has been affixed to the cloth as smoothly as possible, it is necessary to beat the paper into the cloth by means of a "matting" brush, a longhaired rectangular brush with a special handle.

One begins by rubbing until it feels as though the paper has adhered everywhere. Then it is driven into the cloth by beating it with short heavy blows over the whole surface until the paper and cloth have become, as it were, one substance. It is best not to allow this new material to dry too quickly, the „binding“ should have time „to flow together.“ As soon as it is dry, possible irregularities may be worked away with fine sandpaper until the surface is perfectly smooth. Only now is it possible to start work with the poster.

Because most of the posters which require this treatment have already begun to deteriorate, a different technique is required for placing them upon the new backing from that used to bring the paper to the cloth. To begin, the posters are very carefully rolled on to a cardboard cylinder or rolling pin. The new backing is smeared with glue over 20 or 30 cm., and the rest is covered with plastic. The poster is placed in the correct position on the prepared part and is gradually pressed down, beginning at the centre. In most instances the poster will stretch, and so it must be affixed as quickly as possible. But a small margin of the prepared area should be left over so that it is as easy as possible to glue the following portion of the poster.

The part of the poster already glued should be covered with a plastic sheet, and the rolled poster yet to be glued should be laid back upon it. Another area, 20 or 30 cm. wide, is then prepared, and the procedure is repeated until the whole poster has been affixed. When it is completed, the whole should be pressed upon the back more firmly, and shaped if necessary. After the glue is well absorbed, the whole should be covered with absorbent paper, and then rubbed with a matting brush. The absorbent paper may then be removed and the brushing repeated a few times. The poster should be checked to see if it has adhered well. Once again, it should not be allowed to dry too quickly; if necessary, it may be covered with a plastic sheet to slow down the drying process. When it is completely dry, usually after about 24 hours, the work of restoration can begin. Holes should be filled in with a paper pulp made by rolling up a piece of paper tightly, powdering it with a file and then kneading a mixture of the powder and thinned glue to a soft dough. The holes may now be filled in with a small trowel. When they have dried, they should be sanded with fine sandpaper until they match perfectly the surface of the poster. Now they may be retouched to match the poster design, a process requiring some experience. For this work one should have an arsenal of pencils, paints, inks, pastels and so on. A good technique is to thin aniline paint to the right shade and then try it upon a blank piece of paper of the same quality as the poster in question. Having restored the poster to its original state as much as possible, it is advisable to cover it with a layer of *Mipofoli* to prevent the old breaks, folds or filled in areas from working loose once again.

No matter how carefully the restoration has been done, these old weaknesses will always manifest themselves again in time by pulling or thickening or even breaking. *Mipofoli* vulcanises itself, as it were, to the paper, so that the poster is preserved for many years.

After the covering layer has been applied, the whole may then be removed from the stretching table, the superfluous edges cut away and the border finished off with masking tape, that should be applied with a hot iron in this case. The poster is now ready to be hung in storage.

**exhibiting**

*See photos e, f and g*

It is of primary importance that a poster to be exhibited has been protected by tape around its edges to prevent damage.

If the poster had been given a hanger, it should be hung by that hanger if at all possible, and the hanger can always be given the colour of the background. If the hanger is narrower than the poster, the hanger can always be folded under.

Of course, the hanger can be trimmed off if one desires to exhibit without one. The poster should then be stapled into the background at the four corners. Modern staplers make very small holes which may be easily closed again when the poster is taken down. If the poster is to receive a new hanger after exhibiting, then the linking strip should be removed by means of turpentine. This is applied to the front side of the poster, and after 1 or 2 minutes the strip may be removed, cautiously. The strip may also be removed by applying the turpentine to the strip itself, but this requires a somewhat longer time.

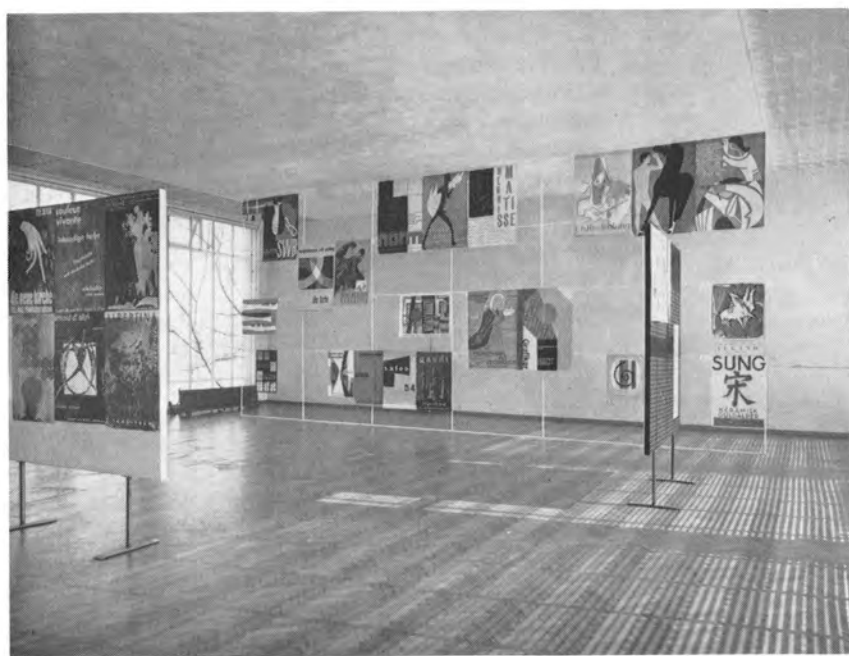
Turpentine does not damage the paper, and it disappears without leaving a trace.

With regard to exhibiting, there are only a few techniques. Stapling to a wall is the most usual. For a large exhibition one has to divide the space by means of large wooden screens to which the posters were stapled.

It is also possible to hang the posters on steel wire by means of plastic clothes-pins.

**e**





**cataloguing —  
documentation**

In order to make a collection of film posters accessible, the following card indices are recommended:

*Film poster card index*

- a Location number
- b Title of film  
Short description of the poster and year of production
- c Name of designer
- d Name of printer, country and city of origin
- e Size of poster
- f Other data



**bibliography****A book of the posters**

by W. S. Rogers

London – Greening and Co Ltd. – 1901

a.o. The care and preservation of posters – How best to display them

**Care and handling of art objects**

by Robert P. Sugden

New York – The Metropolitan Museum of Art – 1946

a.o. Works on paper (drawings, watercolors, prints, miniatures, manuscripts and rare books)

**Museum-work**

'Mounting and preservation of prints'

by William M. Ivins Jr.

vol. 1 – 1918/19, pages 173-179

**The conservation of prints, drawings and manuscripts**

by H. J. Plenderleith

London – 1937

**Graphis annual** (international)

Art editors W. Herdeg and Ch. Rosner

Zürich – 1952

**I'Affiche**

by L. Duca

Edition „Que sais je” – no. 153

Paris – 1947

**Picture posters**

by Ch. Hiatt

London – 1895

A short history of the illustrated placard, with many reproductions of the most artistic examples in all countries

**Enciclopedia delle spettacoli**

Rome – Le Maschere – 1954

**Polski plakat filmowy** (The Polish Film Poster)

by Tadeusz Kowalski

Warszaw – 1957

**Das deutsche Plakat**

by Hellmut Rademacher

Dresden – 1965



print Stadsdrukkerij van Amsterdam  
design Ton Limburg (Stadsdrukkerij)

